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Citizens group assails attitude of EPA toward toxic test results at two sites

By LISA AUG
Niagara Gazette

Levels of toxic chemicals found in two residential area fields do not alarm federal environmental officials, an attitude that has angered a local citizens group.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency does not plan to heed pleas from local residents for fencing and further testing at an old city dump behind Russo Chevrolet and the football field behind Niagara Catholic High School.

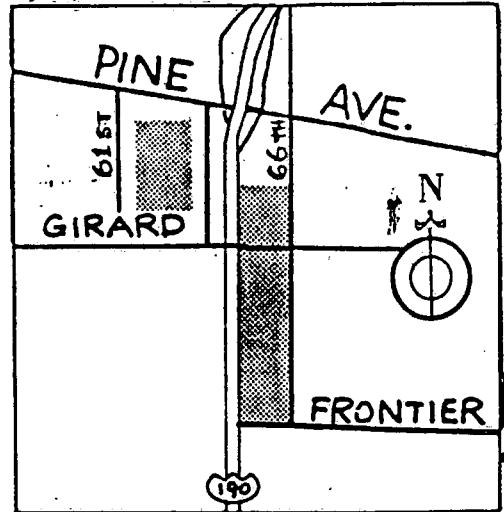
At the dump, known as 64th Street South even though it located east of 61st Street, testing found pesticides and toxic solvents in the surface soil.

At Niagara Catholic, where residents told the EPA that dumping had taken place in the past, testing found highly toxic dioxin at one-tenth the federal safety level. The dioxin was found in soil taken two feet below the surface.

"There might be something there but it's obviously not a level of concern," says Peter Flynn, who oversaw EPA's testing.

"There is a problem, according to the report," insists Anita Fama, president of LaSalle and Niagara Demand, known as LAND. "Why are they stopping (with one round of tests)? Why not go on and find out what's down there?"

According to the federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Ga., the toxics in



ROBERT WYNNE — Niagara Gazette
The screened area shows Russo Chevrolet upper left and Niagara Catholic High School.

the 64th Street dump field do not pose an immediate hazard, but should be covered to prevent human exposure to the soil. Flynn said the vegetation in the field is sufficient cover.

"Kids are out there playing all the time in

the summer, coming home covered with mud," Mrs. Fama says. "We've asked and asked for a fence. Why are they putting at risk those kids that go through there?"

Children from the 66th Street elementary school have roamed through the field during school walking trips, but will do so no longer at the request of LAND, according to school principal Ronald Walter.

Niagara Catholic Principal Moira O'Day says she is satisfied the low level of dioxin behind the school poses no threat, but LAND members are not satisfied with the testing there.

Marge Mendola said the EPA failed to take samples from a filled-in ditch that she said is a likely dumping area for toxic waste.

"If they're going to do anything, they have to find out what's buried there, not just what's migrated (elsewhere)," she says. "This testing is a good start, but it shows another potential groundwater problem in this city."

"They definitely should do more thorough testing to identify what is here," says Wallace Blake, whose property abuts the 64th Street dump. "They don't seem to be that concerned. The origin of that dump is unknown."

Concerned residents prompted plans for other area EPA tests

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The 64th Street South dump and the Niagara Catholic field are the first of 18 industrial sites and suspected dumps in the area to be tested by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

NUS Corp. of Edison, N.J., an EPA contractor, last summer began investigating contamination at 18 sites in the area south of Niagara Falls Boulevard between Packard Road and Interstate 190.

The investigation was launched in response to concerns from area residents about toxic chemicals suspected by an EPA expert to be leaking from the CECOS International hazardous waste landfills or the old

DuPont Co. Necco Park dump, both north of Niagara Falls Boulevard at 56th Street.

CECOS installed a number of new test wells this summer under a groundwater monitoring program ordered by the EPA, and DuPont began drilling a number of wells after falling out with the EPA over the number and location necessary to find migrating chemicals.

But the EPA resisted testing in the residential area unless it could pinpoint the source of any contamination. The agency gave in this spring after discovering 18 other potential sources, both industries and old dumps.

It also reduced a proposed broad, 200-well testing program to six well clusters near Niagara Falls Boulevard, despite the signatures of 400 local residents on a petition requesting neighborhood-wide testing.

The first cluster of four wells is complete, and results from that sampling may be available after the first of the year.

Meanwhile, area residents will hold a meeting in the next few weeks to choose a consultant to study the area and recommend a testing plan. DuPont will pay up to \$20,000 for the consultant.

— Lisa Aug